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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000238

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TAGS: PREL PGOV I2

SUBJECT: VP MEHDI'S WHITE PAPER ON POLITICAL PORTFOLIO OF THE BAGHDAD SECURITY PLAN

Classified By: Ambassador Khalilzad for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In meetings January 18 with Political Counselor and January 19 with the Ambassador, Vice President Abdul Mehdi (Shia) discussed a white paper he drafted for the political portfolio portion of the new Baghdad security plan (BSP). (Embassy e-mailed a copy to the Department on January 20.) He denied sponsoring fast track diplomatic visas for Iranians, and doubted he would cancel his plans to attend the Davos summit on January 27. End Summary.

VP MEHDI PREFERS NOT TO HAVE THIS PORTFOLIO

¶2. (C) VP Mehdi expressed reservations about having been assigned the political portfolio of the new BSP. He feels it is a very ambiguous assignment, without much detail. He outlined that first he needs to understand the goals and targets for the political portfolio, and then he needs to assemble a team. "I would have preferred this mission go to a Sunni," he complained to PolCounselor, "so it will be seen as a multi-ethnic effort." He wondered if he got it because "maybe (Sunni) VP Hashimi can't work with Prime Minister Maliki." Later, he observed that "I am embarrassed to include my mission as Vice President with this mission."

MEHDI'S A WHITE PAPER

¶3. (C) VP Mehdi revealed that he had prepared a white paper outlining the scope and responsibilities of this political portfolio. He gave PolCounselor a copy and asked for our feedback. "This is the way I see the framework, and now I need to see what the PM thinks according to his role as the PM and Commander-in-Chief." The portfolios for security and services are well defined, but not when it comes to political issues.

¶4. (C) PolCounselor agreed with VP Mehdi that security and services portfolios are Baghdad-centric, but that the political portfolio is much broader, and national in scope. PolCounselor pointed out that this was really an opportunity. "You should look at this as a continuation of your efforts on the moderate front," she said. When asked about timing, VP Mehdi said the plan would begin at the end of the month.

FEEDBACK ON THE WHITE PAPER

¶5. (C) The next day, after reviewing the white paper, the Ambassador gave constructive feedback on the plan and encouraged Mehdi, saying it was a good paper. One missing

item, noted the Ambassador, was the issue of militias. Addressing this issue would require a political agreement and therefore should be part of this portfolio. VP Mehdi agreed to address "the undisciplined non-state organized non-terrorist organizations."

¶6. (C) The Ambassador suggested that maybe we should invite all the leaders of the moderate front to a launch meeting, and we could announce that these leaders are all together on working together in solving a specified set of issues with timelines.

¶7. (C) The Ambassador noted that some of the things in the white paper properly belonged to others, such as comments on electricity and services.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador asked Mehdi about a provision he had inserted allowing himself to resign his portfolio responsibilities without notice and without stating a reason. Mehdi explained that he wanted to "protect himself" but he would not elaborate further.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador drew attention to the provision establishing control over the media. VP Mehdi said he was only trying to put rules around the media, and said there are rules in all states providing a framework around freedom of the press. The Ambassador suggested he use language "acknowledging the freedom of the press," or "without interfering with the constitutional rights of freedom of the press." Mehdi said he would consider that.

TRAVEL PLANS AT THE END OF JANUARY

BAGHDAD 00000238 002 OF 002

¶10. (C) The Ambassador pressed VP Mehdi on skipping Davos. VP Mehdi remained uncommitted, saying only that he would do what he could.

IRAN

¶11. (C) VP Mehdi said he had a recent meeting with the Iranian ambassador, who asked for the release of Iranian detainees held by MNF-I. The Ambassador said that the Iranians were claiming that Mehdi was one of several people who had written letters to the Iraqi Embassy and consulates in Iran requesting fast track visas for Iranians. Mehdi insisted his letters were for pilgrims, not diplomats. The Ambassador told Mehdi that the MFA should implement much tighter restrictions on Iranian diplomats.

KHALILZAD